Interview with John M. Steeves

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR JOHN M. STEEVES

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Initial interview date: March 27, 1991

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Q: Today is March 27, 1991 and this is an interview with Ambassador John M. Steeves at Carroll Valley Pennsylvania which is being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and The Lauinger Library.

I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Mr. Ambassador, I wonder if you could give us a little back ground on yourself—where you were born, where you acquired your education, etc.—before we get to your Foreign Service time.

STEEVES: I was born in North Dakota, out in the Sioux Indian country, not many years after The Dakotas became states in the Eighties.

Q: When was that?

STEEVES: 1905.I will just be 86 years old in a few weeks. My father and my people were basically Canadian. My father broke away from the clan (which is the Steeves) that really opened the Bay of Fundy area in New Brunswick in 1766. The real family stock was German who came over from Osnabruck, whose name originally was STIEF in Germany. They had emigrated to the New World when all those people were coming over seeking religious freedom. They had come originally to Philadelphia, spent a short few years there,

and then partly through a real estate promise of Free Land in a New Land as a" come on" and partly because they saw the oncoming revolution went up to New Brunswick, to British territory where great things were promised to them. For there trouble they very nearly starved to death. So the history of the Steeves was a very , very bitter one in the early days. But they have prospered a great deal—there are about 100,000 of them in that area now. We have our own family history, our own family flag, our own family paper. We have our large family clangathering every ten years in July and smaller ones annually. My father picked up his meager belongings as a mere youth and went out to North Dakota to homestead under the North Dakota Homestead Act. He took up property in the Devils Lake area in a little town that turned out to be Brinsmade and there became quite well off overcoming terrible hardships to begin with. Then, when I was a very small boy, with his yen for pioneering and homesteading, again he loaded the whole family up, practically a train load by that time with cattle, property, family etc.,and went up to homestead in Northern Alberta.

So I took my early education in the Canadian schools in Alberta. This has left me with a lot of connections in the city of Edmonton, which is the capital of Alberta. Again, before I was of age to worry about citizenship or anything of that nature, after most of the family were grown, and my mother had passed away, my father, a brother, one sister and I came back to the United States and settled in Western Washington. At that time I took my college education in a Seventh Day Adventist college down in the southeastern corner of the State of Washington. My first overseas stint was as an educational missionary. I went over for the Church. Over a decade or so I finally was elevated to being in charge of all their educational work throughout India, Burma and Ceylon.

But by the onslaught of World War Two, I had become somewhat disillusioned with certain aspects of mission work, anddoctrinally a non-conformist, plus the fact that I was rather anxious to serve the country in the time of war. So I took the opportunity to come back

to the United states. I had tried to join up with the armed services out there knowing the languages of the area, etc. but I was advised to go back to Washington which I did.

I was guided to The Office of War Information which I joined and was placed in a Psychological Warfare unit earmarked for Overseas. Knowing the language of Northern India and some of the people we would be dealing with, I went out attached to the Army ,to The Combat Headquarters in Ledo on the Burma Road. I was given the Assimilated rank of Colonel, which was aconstant conundrum to the routine army administration .

Q: This was the Chinese-Burma-India theater?

STEEVES: CBI theater. That as you may remember after the war was incorporated into the Department of State Operations as the USIS. Now that is a very sketchy, thumbnail tracing.

Q: While you were in India—I have you there from 1927 to 1942—did you have any contact with the Foreign Service, either the embassy or our consulates?

STEEVES: Yes, I did. Like any citizen that is interested in his country I knew the people of the time in the consulate general in Bombay, but only slightly. During the war when the special representative of the President was established in Delhi, I had more of an acquaintance with him. The name of that representative has just slipped my mind. But since India at that time was still part of the British Empire, he could not be given diplomatic accreditation , The President's Personal Representative was a designation used where such a situation existed. So that was what he was called during the Roosevelt administration. Hazelton, was one of his deputies.

Q: Here you were knowledgeable in the politics and social movements in India during the war, did the United States seem to be following a reasonable course in our military dealing with India or was it just pursuing the war and didn't there seem to be much sense to it?

STEEVES: You mean when our armed services began to come into the theater? Yes, I had a very good impression of that and they made a very fine impression. The army in general, which was the branch of the service that came to India on there way up to the Combat Headquarters in Assam on the Burma border. General Sultan was the C.O. in New Delhi. They were very well thought of in that GHQ area in New Delhi. I think they conducted themselves extremely well. The same thing was true when we got up to the front. The facts of the case are that our magnanimity andreputation for generosity kind of made us suckers at times. But the Americans got along extremely well. At times we were the objects of a little jealousy because, quite naturally, the British were not very popular with their colonial subjects. It was rather humiliating at times when the British personnel used to trade things(like their good Scotch whiskey)to us in order to get some of the goodies unknown to them from American stores.

Q: You came into the predecessor of what is now the United States Information Service.

STEEVES: That's right.

Q: In, what year was that, 1945?

STEEVES: Yes, late 1945. The transfer from the Wartime Agency was accomplished piecemeal. It was right out of the middle of the Office of War Information. This logically took the place of the office in the Department that had handled News and Information.

Q: Office of War Information at one time?.

STEEVES: Yes, Office of War Information from which the News Agency was first lifted. Then they asked us to interest ourselves in the office of cultural affairs. This Office of Cultural Affairs was housed in a little, beat- up building across from the old State in an old house(since torn down) on eighteenth street. It was a flea- bitten place. But those were the little roots that we were attached to before we became a full blown US Information and Cultural Service. Some of us therefore were in at the creation of the new agency when

it was first organized under the very colorful Bill Benton of the well-known business of Benton and Bowles.

Q: Benton and Bowles was an advertising firm. The largest advertising firm in the United States.

STEEVES: The new Office of Information and Culture (USIA)blossomed rapidly to a pretty fulsome operation. Not altogether to the glee of the old Foreign Service in those days. But a group of us had the task of sitting down and drawing up the original charters and the organization that became the first full blown organization for the USIA. and we sure had our original fun. We had to adjust old rules, regulations, make exceptions to old time-honored procedure as we went. I hired the first 350 people for the Near East and Africa operation. That's the way it was in my division, it was the old ADN. I was the chief. The first person I hired was a guy by the name of Ernie Fisk. He was a newspaper fellow who had been with OWI in Lyon France, during the war. A wonderful person who lives out in Ohio in Oberlin, now in retirement.

Q: When you were drawing this up I find it very interesting that you were working in Africa and the Near East, both areas colonial preserves of our allies. In the Near East there was an exception such as Saudi Arabia. But the rest had French, British or our troops dominating the area. What did you see as our goals at that time in those areas?.

STEEVES: The goals were pretty clear. To help give the people of those emerging states, working for their independence and self expression, some concept of American institutions and values. We could see what was going to happen, although I don't think we had any concept of it happening quite as fast in Africa, for instance, as it did. We saw it happening in India and then in the Southeast Asian states. That area at that time was under a different division. But India, Burma and Ceylon were in my division, although it was called Near East and Africa—NEA. I guess it was because we were attached for geographic reasons to the old NEA division that Loy Henderson was the head of for a while. Ray Hare,

I think, was the head of the Near Eastern Bureau either after or before Loy Henderson. But anyway, that was where we found our attachment.

Q: Did you find yourself, after all, pushing democracy in all these places that were ready to explode, yet the European powers, particularly France and Britain, were not pushing for independence for these colonial areas?

Did you find that the geographic bureaus, particularly European Affairs, were saying, “Hey fellows, cool it, or be careful don't push this Democratic doctrine too fast?

STEEVES: Yes, they did. They had a conservative view towards the world. The element from which the Foreign Service was taken those days had kind of ready ears for that kind of attitude.

Q: Are we talking about the Eastern establishment the ivy league, etc., from whence many of the Foreign Service establishment had been taken.?.

STEEVES: That's right. People from the wealthy homes of the United States. There was an inevitable movement towards independence and freedom, the Older Order didn't accept very happily. The old stable powers and forces found it very difficult to accept what was going to inevitably happen. I mention in my book that if you wanted to look at it from the standpoint of what was better economically for these countries, one would have to admit that most of them were far better off in their colonial status. Their plea had been “we want to be free to make our own mistakes” and they sure made them. Burma, for instance, had been the shining light of the British Empire, became the tail end of everything. As a nation it lies in ruin. Rangoon, the capital, is a horrible hole. It had been a real shining light of what British administration could do. I think I make the observation somewhere that it will take them a hundred years to get back anywhere near what they were when they gained their independence and even then they will have to do it with our help.

Q: Didn't you feel that you were sort of "young Turks" sitting down in your areas promoting plans for the spread of democracy and that you almost looked upon the European Bureau as the adversary or not?

STEEVES: I didn't feel it so much. But we did feel a lack of appreciation of the problems of the post-colonial world outside of Europe that we had to deal with. in my area when talking about the Near East especially there was an expression used that was quite apt, "those European fellows are always putting their European foot into our Near Eastern mouth." It always irked us a little bit that all the instructions we were sending to Lebanon and Syria had to be cleared by the French desk before they went out. We thought it was none of their darned business! But of course we were wrong for it did impinge on their vital interests. We had a little bit of the same problem that lasted for years with the British. There were those on both sides of the Atlantic that were still very strong for the "British Empire" view..

Q: When you were discussing the British you referred to the "spats", mentality .You are referring to the type of foot gear worn by the more au fait British as characteristic of the British generation of that mind set, were you not?

STEEVES: Yes, and they couldn't quite cotton to this new idea. Thereby hangs a little anecdote. The columnist, Pearson came out with a report in his column one day in The Washington Post.

Q: This was Drew Pearson who was sort of a muckraking columnist?

STEEVES: The story stemmed from an episode in my office one day. Where he ever got a hold of it I don't know. But we were packing the kits for all the posts in our area. I was there helping the staff get these things together and as we were putting in copies of the Declaration of Independence, I said just as a kind of a joking passing remark while picking up one of the copies, and looking at it, "Boy you know this is pretty heady stuff

to be sending out to these people, I wonder if this is more than they can digest." Drew Pearson got a hold of that from somebody and said that,- he named me by description pretty well-our basic doctrines on freedom were a little too strong to be spread around the world and we ought to be careful how we put them out. That is the way he interpreted it. I got called on the carpet for that.

Q: You have to watch what you are saying even in the packaging process!.Now, there were two major developments happening in your area of concern: Indian Independence and the partition of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel. We will come to the Indian one later, but on the partition of Palestine, Where were you? in Washington during the partition of Palestine?

STEEVES: I sure was.

Q: Could you tell how that impacted on our operation and how you saw this?

STEEVES: I sure can tell you. The partition of Palestine and the establishment of the State of Israel, theforceful ejection of Palestinians from their homeland in the way it has been carried out, was the beginning of sorrows in that strategic part of the Near East, the results we see only too well before us to-day..

Q: Today we are talking less than a couple of weeks after the war we had with Iraq. For the record, that fixes the time frame, of this conversation. To go back to the year when The State of Israel was established, where were you serving then?

STEEVES: I was already a Foreign Service officer by that time. I had gone into The Foreign Service under the Manpower Act and was merely serving my time in my old job transforming the old USIA, the ADN, into its more formal connection with the Bureau of Near Easter Affairs under Loy Henderson. Later in that same year he left the same time as I did to go out as the new Ambassador to India. I went out to New Delhi as the chief public

affairs officer. I went up to Delhi with him on the same plane, having met him in Bombay after going out by boat. He came out by plane.

Prior to our departure that year, the discussions on Palestine and its future was all-consuming. The Balfour Declaration had been passed by Britain, virtually washing their hands of this naughty problem. In doing this the British had passed the “buck” to us to shepherd to some kind of solution with the help of the United Nations. If the Jews were to be given their temporal state again, their homeland, it had to be done with the utmost care to keep it from blowing the Near East wide open. There might be ways for it to be done if it was done gradually and with the proper safeguards, but the way it would be looked upon in 1947, by the Arab World and those who sympathized with the Palestinians, was that there had been ruthless rape of the Palestinians and their rights. They were thrown out lock, stock and barrel with no arrangement for compensation, for their homes, for their lands and cruelly being sent into refugee camps and being told, “You Arabs take care of yourselves somehow, we don't care how you do or who does it.” Those close to the problem saw rather clearly what would happen. NEA, the policy operating group advising the Secretary and the President, tried very hard to see not only what was necessary, because we could see that probably the idea of a home for the Jews of some kind had to be satisfied. Political pressures back home were great, but it had to be done right or we would see the storm it would create in the Near East. NEA got to be looked upon, and Loy Henderson and his staff in particular, as the people who were dragging their heels in carrying out a policy that the Zionists and their sympathizers were hammering home by leaders like Eleanor Roosevelt and President Truman. Because of his well known advice to move with extreme caution at this delicate time ,Ambassador Henderson nor the Dept of State was informed that the act of supporting the U.N. Resolution was going to take place. The action was learned of from the New York Times that the United Nations had passed the Resolution. Then, of course, all hell broke loose.

That was the genesis of the wars that have been going on ever since and now with all the benefit of 20/20 hindsight, I don't know what could have been worked out that might have

made it better. But there we see the beginnings of the trouble that we are reaping now. How we are going to solve the problem now, even with all the good relations we have with some very good friends among the Arabs I really don't know. The Secretary with his trips out there has discovered again that this is just next to insolvable?...

Q: We are talking now about the situation with Secretary of State James Baker. I wonder going back, because we are trying to concentrate on the time that this happened, did you find yourself in the USIA operation taking care to have special packages or presentations and all within the Middle East to explain our positions? What were you doing?

STEEVES: I suppose we must had. To tell you the truth I don't know, but I guess we did because I can remember one of the remarks indicative of Loy Henderson's principle of loyalty to authority even if he personally disagreed with it, which he made the very next day, “Well our position has been thrown out and there is no room at all for the feelings that NEA or I personally hold, nor any of our recommendations. There is only one thing that we can do and that is to be good soldiers in carrying out the policy. So from here on out the explanation has got to be that this is the United States' policy and the status of the new Israel must be protected and the Arabs must learn to get along with the United States support of Israel.” I sat with him during some of his interviews in the days after that and you would never know that he ever held a different view in his life.

Q: To turn to the next page, you went to India in 1948. 1948 was a big year for partitions. You said you went with Loy Henderson.

STEEVES: Yes, that is right. I went out via one of the most beautiful sea voyages I have ever had in my life. I got on the maiden voyage of the “Silver Plane” down in Brooklyn Basin and 42 days later landed in Bombay.

Q: Did you have the feeling at the time that Loy Henderson was sent to India because he was so sympathetic with the Arab world and the idea was to get him out of the picture?

STEEVES: Every move, of a senior officer you know, takes that into consideration. Sometimes sympathetically. When we are talking about sending people into senior positions we often say, “For heavens sake don't torture the guy by making him go there and carry out a policy that he really isn't very happy about.” There could have been an element of that. Henderson was not well accepted by the Zionists. They had him targeted and as you know when they have their ways of influencing action. If that was there it was out of my sight . I didn't see it.

Q: You arrived in India and what was the situation at the time?

STEEVES: When we got to India, independence had been declared the year before. They had gone through the blood bath of the first few months of it. The awful scenes of the massacres and slaughter of innocent people by the train load when they were exchanging people, Muslims allegedly going north and Hindus coming south. There was a train load of Muslims passing through the native state of Patiala that were stopped at a station and the Sikhs systematically went through that train and murdered every single individual on it. Of course, coming the other direction, the same thing was likely to happen to Hindus going south.

Q: You were in charge of public affairs. What were your major objectives in your particular field and how did you find dealing with that?

STEEVES: We still tried to do everything we possibly could to give a realistic exposure of the American scene to the people of India, whether we did it through motion pictures, or through the release of information or cultural events or the running of a library. We had three very good libraries in India: one in Bombay, one in Delhi and another in Calcutta.

Q: How did you find dealing with the new Indian government?

STEEVES: We had excellent relations.

Q: Relations were good in that period?

STEEVES: Oh yes. For instance there came the event very soon after our arrival when we went to present our credentials to the New President of India. Ambassador Henderson was the first full blown American Ambassador there in the new India-and the Indians had no other understanding of pomp and ceremony, but to carry the ceremony out about like the British had done. Having been in India before and remembering some of the same affairs with the British; there were those same Sikh guards, with their long lances , high turbans, etc-so statuesque you could have stuck a lighted cigarette in their eye and they would not have blinked.

We got up to the Durbar Hall where after all of the dramatic ceremony before the great oaken doors would be swung open, to match the scene nothing less than seeing a armored knight on a white charger come out to announce the President would have been appropriate. But instead a little man leaning on a cane came out wearing a turban , a dhoti, and dark glasses. I couldn't help but remember the story that I had heard the day before ,which I shall tell you in a bit.

Q: This was Mahatma Gandhi?

STEEVES: No, this was Rajagopalachari- the first President of India .He was a wonderful scholar, a truly great man, but still of the old- fashioned Orthodox Brahmin ways. He was very, strict in the observance of his Brahmin caste rules. I had heard this story the day before and knowing a good deal about India I believed it. In order to purify the food that came out of the great fancy kitchen downstairs he had to have the walls smeared with cow dung in order to purify it. When he came to Loy Henderson's house for a meal, which he finally agreed to do, he had to bring his own bearers along with his own utensils to stand behind his chair and serve it to him. He couldn't touch anything in the place.

Q: Could you explain how Loy Henderson operated in the embassy and how he dealt with the Indians, because he is one of the great figures of the Foreign Service and I would like your impression of his style?

STEEVES: As you know, Loy Henderson had no peers in his knowledge of protocol and procedure and policy and things of that nature. He was a wonderful gentleman and a good teacher to learn from and take instructions from. I can see him just sitting there going over your draft and saying, “Take this or that out, save superlative words of that nature for some really demanding moment.” He was a good preceptor and disciplinarian when it came to that type of form. He was the same way when dealing with people in a very correct and proper way.

Now, having said that, his usefulness with all of that ability in dealing with leaders like Pandit Nehru was diminished a little bit by the fact that secretly he disliked and mistrusted Nehru. He disliked Nehru with a passion and didn't appreciate him but dealt with him very correctly. The day that Truman ordered American troops into Korea...

Q: June 1950?

STEEVES: Yes, President Truman sent instructions out to the Ambassador to go to the Prime Minister Nehru and see if he could get his permission to send an Indian contingent in the United Nations force into Korea. Loy Henderson, with all the experience he had had in Russia and elsewhere, made a remark I found a bit strange. What he said to me in the car going up there that day (he had asked me to go up with him to see Nehru) was “Today is one of the proudest moments of my career.” He would have rocked me back on my heels if he had said that when I was standing up. I figured out in thinking about it years later that he was so glad to be the messenger of that kind of a tough message to this Nehru, and to tell him what the great United States expected of him if he wanted to be a decent member of the world community. The Ambassador couldn't forget that after all that China had done when the Communists took over the country, Nehru, in the early days of

the independence of India-had been the first to recognize the brutal Communist regime. He had stabbed the poor Chinese in the back by throwing out the Nationalist Chinese Ambassador and was one of the first to invite in the Communist Chinese Ambassador.

Q: When Henderson was going up to ask Nehru to supply troops did you think he had any feeling that they would? .

STEEVES: No, and of course they really didn't. But I will tell you what they did do as a symbolic act. They sent over a very efficient military field medical unit, you know. They performed very well in Korea. So they were at least numbered among the nations that supported the United Nations effort in Korea.

Q: What do you think was behind Henderson's antipathy towards Nehru?

STEEVES: Well, Henderson was kind of a purist in the way he lived and thought of other people. He didn't want you to profess to be one thing and then turn out to be something else. Nehru to him was in a way a British country gentleman and then turned around and tried to be an Indian peasant in politics and the two didn't fit at all. One personality was always jarring against the other. For him to be almost kissing Gandhi's feet was next to ridiculous, almost comic opera to see him in thissycophantish way act around Gandhi.

You could see that where he really felt at home was in his tweeds with a shooting stick standing on the downs of England watching the foxes. That really was where he felt more at home. He was the fellow who had the reputation of writing a book that was looked upon by Lord Macaulay as one of the finest collection of British prose in the English literature. He was nobody's fool. Nehru was a very bright fellow.

Later we took Nehru to the United States. He acted as though he wasn't interested at all in going. He didn't look upon it as any great favor. His daughter, Indira, who we had to deal with later after Nehru was gone, carried on the same haughty attitude towards the United States.

The attitude was reciprocated. When Nehru invited us up to the Presidential Lodge—it used to be called the Viceroy's House and is a real crown jewel of the British Empire in terms of the beautiful interior, a palatial place. The State Dining Room can seat between 100 and 150 people at one long table with a beautifully bedecked waiter standing behind every chair waiting to respond to your every wish. It was in that type of atmosphere when we went up for the State dinner welcoming the first American Ambassador to India that Mrs. Henderson picked up the silverware and wiped off the knife and said, “You can never tell what you get in these places.” Here she was sitting along side of Nehru. Nehru, the perfectly trained country gentleman that he was, if he could have turned over and swatted her he would have. If looks could have killed her she would have been dead. Anyway he was too self-controlled to allow that to bother him. But that is another reason why the Indians and everybody else, including our staff, of course, too, disliked Mrs. Henderson. She was a real “pain in the neck.”

Q: Well she is one of the great dragons in the Foreign Service wasn't she?

STEEVES: Oh, yes. She was terrible. I could fill rest of the tape with stories of Mrs. Henderson. She was awful.

Q: Was there anything else we should cover in New Delhi? We covered the Korean War and the arrival there. Was there any resistance on the part of the Indians to your efforts to talk about the United States?

STEEVES: No. We were welcomed everywhere. I had the best of reception for our libraries, our music, our efforts at promoting things American. When we were putting on our trade fair or any displays of that nature it went over very big in India.

Q: Then you left Delhi in 1950 and were transferred as Political Counselor to Tokyo?

STEEVES: I was sent back to the National War College from Delhi and then was sent to Tokyo.

Q: That was 1951.You were talking about imperial people, Douglas MacArthur was still holding forth there?

STEEVES: I ran into Doug during my second tour there when I was stationed down on the Islands as the Consul General at Naha and Political Adviser to the Ryukyuan Command. That is where I got started in my political-military role, after the War College and after my tour of two years in Tokyo at the Embassy.

Q: When you were in Tokyo, Robert Murphy was the Ambassador most of the time?

STEEVES: That's right, I was there during the last year of the Occupation and then with the first Ambassador under independence, Bob Murphy.

Q: Robert Murphy and Loy Henderson were probably the two major figures in the Foreign Service. How would you describe Robert Murphy's style of operation.

STEEVES: Bob Murphy, you must remember was well named—he was an Irishman. We used to have a signal that we gave each other as we were going down the hall toward morning staff meeting. If Bob Murphy was in a good mood we would smile; if we knew he wasn't we would put our hands on top of our head. He could be a Tartar in demanding things that he wanted done. I was the political counselor under Bob Murphy and my window looked out on the road that led down to the Administrative Office where the communications center was and from where the morning cables came. I would watch for that courier and the minute he got into the door I would grab him and look over those cables right away because I knew it would only take about 16 minutes before Bob Murphy's squawk box would yell, “John, what are you doing about so-and-so?” One was always under that type of pressure.

But along with all that exacting pressure and expectation of near excellence of performance as far as Bob Murphy was concerned, there was also that great big open armed magnanimity and good nature that you just couldn't escape. I used to play golf with him. We would have a very rough day and along in the afternoon he would call up and say, “John, what do you think? Lets go have a game of golf.” It was his kind of way of saying, “Let's forget everything else that is going on today.”

Q: How did he get along with the Japanese? This is a brand new government and he was the first Ambassador.

STEEVES: Very mixed. Some, like F.M.Okazaki he liked and they got along very well. We used to joke about everything we told Murphy that he didn't accept. He would always say,” Okazaki didn't tell me that” and that was that. Many of the other typical Japanese he didn't understand too well. The Japanese are never very direct. They speak in metaphors or in 'oblique ways' all the time. They never tell you anything directly. Bob Murphy was exactly the opposite.

Q: What sort of things were you reporting on? Political movements were just getting going again after Independence.

STEEVES: Yes, by the time Bob Murphy was there you see the aftermath of the Occupation, when Labor, and the Communists were making their first trouble for the Liberals which, in Japan, are really the Conservatives.

One of the things that took a lot of my time was that I was the Chairman of the Committee made up of embassy personnel and from the military command to negotiate with Japanese on the Administrative Agreements required to be worked out under our Treaty with the Japanese. These Agreements were to govern our cooperative arrangements under our Mutual Security Treaty and Occupation relationships as long as they would apply.

In passing, it is interesting to observe that forty years later, as I speak, the Treaty provisions still govern our conduct in Japan for our forces stationed there.

An anecdote to tell you how difficult some of those provisions of the new Treaty were to initiate, the next morning after the 29th of April when the Occupation ended, somebody called up and said, “Say, that MP is still down there [naming a main square in Tokyo] directing traffic. Will you send somebody down there and get him out of there.” Here the Japanese had been training for months and they were itching to show off those fancy dances they do in directing traffic, and some dumb military person down the line hadn't, got the word. These MPs didn't see anything different between yesterday and today and they were still directing traffic. So it was an awful hard time to get these nuances across to the Americans.

Q: You got this in spades later on when you were in Naha, but I would imagine one of your major jobs was dealing with the American military which had been living very well. While you were negotiating about these troops, I was a trooper. I was anenlisted man in the air force at Johnson Air Force Base then. I know how the enlisted men lived so I can imagine how the officers lived.

STEEVES: The house that I was given under the Occupation arrangements was a solid block square with the most beautiful stone fence you ever saw around it. A Japanese garden that would make your mouth water and a staff to run it. Fresh flowers were delivered to my door every morning. These were the perks we got under the Occupation.

Q: It must have been really a cultural shock dealing with this?

STEEVES: It was a case of them getting tough. General Lawton was the man I dealt with a lot. He became very stern on this business of getting instructions out for people to get into their place and to respect the Japanese rights. It was difficult for the Americans to

knuckle under and gradually give up 50 cents a round for the championship golf courses and luxuries of that nature.

Q: How did we view, again we are talking about the '51 and '52 period, the Soviet threat in Japan?

STEEVES: There was a communist element. There was a communist paper, I think it was called “The Red Flag,” which was an a annoying nuisance but not a great problem. The American security and later on the Japanese security saw to it that it was handled pretty effectively. I am surprised that afterIndependence and years afterward that they haven't landed on them more severely than they have. You take the demonstrations that they are having out at the airport—I don't quite understand how they allow that type of thing to happen. It is completely unJapanese for them to allow it .

The only challenge there was to the Yoshida [prime minister] types, were the Social Democrats, led by someone I can't think of right now, who was growing somewhat in popularity. I remember when Nelson Spinks (the officer I replaced as Political Counselor) had the head of the Socialist Democrats over for dinner to his house. He had become a bit of a problem and was getting quite a bit of the vote even before I left Japan.

Q: Did we feel, going back to the times when the Social Democrats were a party, that we didn't want to see them take over. Did we have a bias towards the Liberal Democrats?

STEEVES: We had a kind of paternal interest in the Yoshida people. P.M. Yoshida was the one that MacArthur had put in office and he was such a cooperative fellow to deal with. He understood Americans so well as did the people that were in his cabinet. He epitomized like none other that I can think of right off the Japanese ability to get along with those who defeat them. As you know there is no people in the world who know how to do that better and turn that into an asset. You would think that the Japanese were our devoted allies the way they cooperated with the Occupation. So Yoshida epitomized that attitude on the part of many Japanese and became very popular. The people who followed

on after him had very much of that same attitude. The people who became the political football in later years, and those who became subject to scandal and corruption were something we really didn't know in our early days at all.

Q: How did you find the staff of our embassy at that time? Was it one that was responsive to Japan?

STEEVES: Yes. We had a very high class staff. Certainly in the leadership that I knew. Dr. Waring was the head of the economic section. He was opposite me. We had Dick Lamb, who knew Japanese like he knew English—he had a Japanese wife. Dick Finn and Bill Sullivan, a young officer. Bill Sullivan was a young, brilliant officer with a great sense of humor.

Q: From a different mold.

STEEVES: From a different mold. One morning somebody said that somebody had just deliberately disagreed with the Ambassador when he had said some rather harsh things about President Syngman Rhee of Korea criticizing the Japanese. In a comment in a passing telegram our Ambassador in Korea, Ambassador Muccio, had agreed with Rhee! Sullivan, the brash young fellow, that he was, walked into the big" bull pen" that we used before moving over to the embassy, and said, "Hurrah for Muccio!." Someone thought this was pretty brash because it was just the opposite of what Murphy had been standing for. Murphy heard about it and of course that was heresy y for Murphy for anyone on the staff to disagree with him. So pretty soon I got a call from Murphy who said, "Did I hear something about Bill Sullivan that I ought to know about?" I said, "Well maybe you should , what did you hear?" He told me what he had heard and said, "Send him up here." So I said to Bill, "Bill I think you are in trouble you had better figure what you are going to do because the Ambassador wants to see you." "Well, that's okay," he said, "I never saw one Irishman afraid of another one any day." I might say that Bill Sullivan went on to quite a

distinguished career in the Foreign Service.. If we get around to it I can tell you something about that too. Anyway, he was a very bright officer.

Q: I am pushing on as there are many areas to talk about. You then went to Djakarta in 1953-55 as deputy chief of mission. How did you get that job?

STEEVES: Well, I will tell you how I got it. I was just getting ready to come back to the United States at the end of my tour and told I would be returning for another tour. At the Fourth of July party somebody came along and said I should get down to the embassy as there was a message down there that may be of interest to me. It said, “Would you be willing to forego your leave and go immediately to Djakarta to act in the Ambassador's place until we find a new Ambassador?” And you know back in those days that a question of that nature was an order. My daughter was going to be married in a little while back in Washington, but I sent back immediately that yes, I would go. I will spare you all of the gory details that I personally got involved in by closing shop in Tokyo, going back to Washington for two weeks consultation and going out to an embassy that was just on the verge of collapse either from lack of leadership, illness or disarray. Everybody was either sick or disgusted to the point where they were practically shutting up shop.

Q: What was the situation, we are talking about in 1953 when you got there? What had brought this about?

STEEVES: I regret to say that much of the problem could be traced to the last ambassador-Cochran

Q: He was the Ambassador?

STEEVES: He had been the Ambassador out there and had, from all reports, sat over in the residence satisfied with himself and hadn't a clue of what was going on in the place or didn't care. He had sold a bill of goods to the Department to buy all of his Louis XIV velvet

upholstered furniture that he had brought from Paris and ship it to the tropics in Djakarta. None of it could be used to sit on because it wouldn't hold a normal person's weight.

He had made a deal somehow with FBO to pay $40,000 for it. This gives you a little bit of a measure of the type of man he was. When I got out there the flag wasn't up, the drivers were sitting around on the stoop of the chancery with their feet up on the chairs. You could have thrown a cat through the holes in the rugs inside. I went to send a message to the code room that I had arrived and the y said, “Sorry, the code room hadn't been in operation for three days because there was no one well enough to run it.” This was symbolic of everything that was going on there. It was the closest thing to a Charles Adams novel that I have ever run into in the Foreign Service.

Q: Weren't there other people? You can have a lousy Ambassador, and I assume Cochran was a career officer...

STEEVES: He was, but what the dickens he did I don't know. We got into that afterwards. Hatta was the opposition chap next to Sukarno. They used to say that any time they would bring Cochran a message, all he would say before brushing it aside was “Hatta didn't tell me that.” And so it became a byword among the few who tried to get messages out. They used to joke and say to each other, “Hatta didn't tell me that.”

Q: Hatta being...?

STEEVES: Hatta being the only opposition there was in the country to Sukarno.

Q: But somehow he had gotten the ear of the Ambassador. Had you been warned about the situation before you arrived?

STEEVES: Yes, that is the reason they had asked me to go out there. I had gotten the reputation of being a pretty good organizer and running staffs and getting along with people.

Q: Well, what about the deputy chief of mission or others there ? I would have thought that others would...

STEEVES: There had been two Charges since the Ambassador left. Hohenthal and Harry Bell. Harry Bell did his best for the short time he was in before my arrival but Harry knew he was just a caretaker and is a much better economic thinker than executive. He was the next in line in a senior capacity.

Q: Later as Director General did you ever wonder why...Indonesia after all is the fourth largest country in the world in population...did you ever wonder why this happened? Did this just happen to be the place we sent people we didn't know what to do with?

STEEVES: No, Maybe it took longer than we remember for Independent Indonesia to get our attention. There was none of what you infer as being the 'Siberia' for the unqualified .Back in those days when the Service was pretty career minded and disciplined there was less of that than now. We had a few good officers, one or two. They were pretty far down the line. Underwood, Francis Underwood, who later became Ambassador to Malaysia, a marvelous fellow. But he was a third secretary when I went down there. I found him a real stalwart. The guy that I discovered in about four hours that I could lean on for knowledge and from the standpoint of knowing what was going on in the place was the head of the CIA, Ralph Redford .. He is retired in Washington now. He knew more about Indonesia, knew the language, as did Underwood, and had a better feeling for what was going on, etc. Those two fellows helped me more than any of the others.

Q: How did you shake the embassy up?

STEEVES: Well, I will tell you what I did. I just had a visceral feeling concerning what makes people tick. Nobody ever shows any respect towards his job or his work place if it doesn't look like it deserves respect. In about 48 hours I got rid of the dirty rugs, we got the whitewashers in to clean up the outside. During the Dutch Administration there

used to be an ordinance strictly enforced, for this to be done periodically. The flag pole was repaired so that we could the flag up. The notice that was hanging akimbo o on the post was immediately hung straight. If anything needed painting or touching up I saw to it immediately. The drivers were given fresh white uniforms, which was what they wear down there. In about ten days we had the car running, we had people standing around as though they knew what they were doing and had the offices assigned where people would go to work and knew that they were expected to be there at a certain time. When they introduced me to the gal, the old New England spinster, they said,(whatever her name was)" this is the new Charg# who has come down to take charge of the embassy." I said, "I am very glad to meet you and delighted that I am going to be working with you. How long have you been here?" She said, "I have been here a year and a half. A pretty long time to be in a sinking ship don't you think? "

Q: High morale!

STEEVES: So, anyway, to make a long story short, we did whip it into line. We got people healthwise back on their feet and those who were really sick taken care of. We got some discipline back and it wasn't very long until we were going great guns.

Q: What was the political situation in this '53-'55 period?

STEEVES: The capital was practically under siege. Not against the Americans, we were in no danger at all. But against the current government and the remaining Dutch. The Indonesian government was at odds with the Darul Islam who were the orthodox Islamic fanatical rebels. You could drive outside of Djakarta five or six miles but you better be sure that they knew you were an American or they were apt to take a shot at you. We used to go up into the Punjab, which was the high hills, for weekends and these Darul Islam people would come by to see us in the evening and ask us for cigarettes, or the equivalent of two bits, wish us well and go on. They were carrying submachine guns, etc.

Q: Did we have any position vis-a-vis the local struggle?

STEEVES: Yes, we had supported the Independence effort against the Dutch. We supported Sukarno but the situation was complicated by the Communists supporting an movement where they could cause the greatest disruption. Sukarno was a man void of principle. He was playing a double game very cleverly, which was all too clear in later years. But initially he deceived many, some of our people too I am afraid, attempting in those days to play us off as real suckers by making believe that he was a great anti-communist, when he was quite helpful to them. What he was doing was playing footsie with the communist elements. And then, of course, he just completely turned over to being a full-fledged collaborator with the communists in later years and very Anti-western.

Q: Your new Ambassador was Hugh Cumming. How did you, he and others view Sukarno at the time?

STEEVES: Did you know Hugh?

Q: No, I don't think I have ever met him.

STEEVES: Hugh got a bad start and it turned out to be the reason I stayed on there a year and a half instead of 60-90 days I was supposed to. I am sorry to point out so directly to a basic flaw which one must understand in working with Hugh. He believes in employing intrigue. That is his policy and he doesn't mind taking you aside and telling you so. He would come to me and say, “Now I tell you John, the way to keep staff in line is to find out who someone doesn't get along with and then you do the same with the other party.” I said, “Mr. Ambassador, you don't treat people that way. At least I won't.” So he and I didn't hit it off very good. I said, “As your Deputy, if I have to deal that way you can just get someone else because I am not going to be a party to dealing with people that way. It is not the way to gain people's confidence.” He tried to get me to open people's mail to find out who was up to mischief. I refused to do that. To introduce this character flaw of

Hugh Cumming is a strange way to answer your question about relations with Sukarno, but he attempted to deal with non-Americans the same way he did with his associates. He discovered he had in Sukarno, a man who dealt in the same coin. But then everything came to a roaring stop for a while.

He was a very fidgety fellow and was sitting in a camp chair in one of our American business places up in the Punjab, Megamengdun, one night and stuck both sets of fingers into both sides of a folding chair and darn near amputated both thumbs! My wife got him patched up well enough to get him back down to the city where our doctor got him bandaged up and splinted. Complications set in and we flew him to Manila for a long treatment. He was there over two months. So, here I was back running things again.

I should not leave the subject of Cumming without a closing word answering the question about the Ambassador and Sukarno. The word is that he attempted to outsmart Sukarno, but that did not succeed any better in his case than with others who tried it and failed.

It is quite evident that I didn't get along very well with Hugh so when I left Djakarta it was not with very good feelings about him. I may say that in later years he made a great show of asking my pardon and repenting completely for the nasty way he had acted. He was on the Board when I was on the Career Ministers List. When you are on those Boards selecting candidates for promotion, you don't go to the individuals concerned afterwards and tell them how you voted, but he did with me. He came and said, “Now I just want you to know, that I was the one who placed your name in nomination for promotion.

Q: You probably couldn't help wondering what sort of conspiracy he was working...

STEEVES: I was the Director General then when he sidled up toward me. I kind of looked out of the window while he was telling me this story.. I considered the source and let it drop.

Q: Then you went from Djakarta to Naha in Okinawa as the consul general and also the political adviser. You were there from 1953 to 1955. Could you explain the situation and what your job entailed?

STEEVES: From the standpoint of personal relationships and comforts that was a delightful assignment because it was with the military command. I got along with all of them extremely well . General Moore and all of his staff. I got the Command people to give up a perfectly delightful site that they had begun to fix up—in fact, put a million dollars into it actually—and use a s a club. I told them that it would look very, very bad for them to be occupying a place like that as a military club—high on a cliff overlooking the China Sea and obviously beyond their needs. I said, “You know what you ought to do with that? You ought to turn it in to the consulate general.” I got Washington's permission to go along with that and they did.

Q: That's diplomacy.

STEEVES: It was the old Japanese navalinspection site. It had a lighthouse on it. It still had the rings on the wall where they tied up the pirates that they caught at sea. It was a marvelous place. One of the Okinawa contractors built new counters for us out of that lovely travertine that they have naturally in Okinawa and put it all in for nothing. It was one of the most delightful offices I have ever had in my life.

Q: What were the issues?

STEEVES: The issues were occupation problems. Getting the Command to do the types of things for the Okinawa people that would bring about the right relationships between the two, which is not very easy.

Q: Was that the period when you had either a communist or socialist mayor of Naha?

STEEVES: No, neither the Mayor of Naha nor Okinawa Governor were Communist. You must be referring to Senaga, a member of the native Council—or some such office.

Q: How did that work?

STEEVES: Senaga caused us a lot of trouble for he was an out and out communist. He was popular with the people on some issues but he had to be controlled very carefully. Under Military Rule, of course , he could have been dealt with very quickly. But that would not have been a wise course to follow.

Q: This was the fifties. How did you deal with him?

STEEVES: Well, he could be isolated pretty well because he didn't have a lot of influence, but he had potential influence. He was beginning to gain popularity with the teachers union. Then, we had done so many things for the Okinawans that were obvious benefits that they could kind of see where their bread was buttered. I, for instance, sent back to India and got the Coiembatore Experimental Station to send me great crate loads of experimental cuttings to revolutionize their sugar industry. One of the things that I really prize in the Foreign Service was when they sent me a silver cask with the first sugar that they got from the new cane some years later.

Q: At this period I take it that Okinawa Reversion to Japan was not a major issue.

STEEVES: It became a major issue somewhat later. It was just beginning when I left. It was growing all the time because the Japanese wanted the islands back and the overtures and propaganda was strong and constant.

Q: How about the Okinawans?

STEEVES: Yes, for cultural reasons, language especially, they would be just more at home with their own Japanese people despite the fact that they were always looked on as

country second cousins. They suffered a lot by being looked down upon by the Japanese. I am afraid that is happening again—and we told them it would.

Tenure as Director General of the Foreign ServiceInterviewer: Thomas Stern

Q: Mr. Ambassador, I would like to focus on your period as Director General of the Foreign Service. First of all, how were you selected?

STEEVES: I will never know. I was peacefully in Afghanistan minding my own business. I had been there for almost five years when I got word from Bill Crockett, the then Deputy Under Secretary for Administration, that I was being asked to return to Washington to take on the responsibilities of being Director General. I never looked into the background of this appointment because I always presumed that there wasn't any. Sometimes there are of course reasons, but I have never looked for them. I had never worked with Bill Crockett before nor had I known him.

Q:How was your relationship with Crockett?

STEEVES: It began smoothly enough, developing into rocky, at times, unpleasant misunderstandings. I was terribly sympathetic with Bill Crockett's point of view. He was a kindly fellow. He had some very good ideas, but Bill had a tendency to blow hot and cold—perhaps those are not the right words to describe it. In any case, I found Bill high and low intermittently. He used to say that he refused to become beholden to regulations or rules. He could be all enthusiastic for a plan one day and suddenly get a new unorthodox idea that he thought would be just great and want it put into operation immediately. He would go in one direction and suddenly he would veer off it. But a lot of this can be explained by the terrible pressures that Bill was under.

Bill had a strong desire to become known as an innovator. This may have been born from a feeling of inferiority which he tried to hide by doing things that proved intellectual capacity. One of his wildest and most expensive introductions, was that he had the

Department, under his office, bring in a very costly program on contract, from Stanford University known as, Sensitivity Training which almost wrecked our Personnel Operation. This system had as is goal the destruction of the oldauthoritarian relationship between officers in an organization and the staff. They were to consider themselves on an equal level and to prove it they had to spend endless hours in sessions telling each other what they thought of each other. It even extended into weekend sessions off site where staffs met in resorts and really let 'their hair down',attempting to achieve 'Nirvana' in these seances. In some places in business, I have heard the results were so severe where it was tried that some people had committed suicide. Fortunately after costing the Department 1.5 million Bill resigned for other reasons, and the whole thing was thrown out together with the 'Cultists' from Stanford.

Bill had another practice which he employed to the absurd extreme and finally allowed it to be his undoing and cause his resignation. He reaped much benefit in accomplishing some of his goals by obsequious toadying to a certain few in high places who would do him favors. President Johnson, John Rooney and Wayne Hayes in Congress. He had no principle he would not break if any of his masters called and asked him to do a favor.

The last pathetic meeting I had with Bill at his call ,at his home, after he got back from a particularly unpleasant trip with Vice-President Johnson to the Far East, brought him to the end. I just can't pay the checks". He didn't mean that in financial terms, but rather that he couldn't meet the President's demands any longer. There had been too many people who had been promised favors that Bill couldn't deliver. Johnson had been brutal to an extreme even after all the efforts Bill had made to cater to him and he decided he had had enough.

Q: Let me pursue your comments about Crockett's relationship to the White House. Did you think of that as an unusual relationship? Did any of Crockett's predecessors have anything like it?

STEEVES: I did not know Bill Orrick, who was Crockett's immediate predecessor, or one removed, so I can't comment on your question. Lets take the relationship for favors with Congressman Rooney first. It may be that Ambassador Loy Henderson, was Bill's predecessor whose attitude towards Rooney was that after all if-Rooney was the Chairman of the Appropriation Committee through whom State's appropriation approved, the Department had to get along with him. But that is as far as Loy would go. After all there was considerable difference between Henderson and Crockett and their relative stature in Washington. He would never have provided the personal services and run errands and do all the things that Crockett did. I would arrive at the office in the morning and ask where Bill was. One time, he was out seeing Rooney at the hospital—I didn't even know that Rooney had been sick. Crockett was Rooney's errand boy when he was ill (or drunk)or wanted to go somewhere, Bill would take him and on and on it went. It was darn near scandalous. I don't think the Department got any pay-off at all for the work Bill did for Rooney. I guess it would be difficult to pass judgment on this questions without all the facts about the budget, but we all know that John Rooney was a hard task-master in terms of his relationship to the Department. I never saw much evidence that Bill and his colleagues succeeded in softening Rooney's heart much.

Q: As to the White House, did it interfere with the Department's personnel operations while you were the Director General?

Ambassador: Yes, it did. I can tell you two or three specific instances to illustrate the point. I could multiply them quite a lot. The President called up one morning and said: “This is the President. What do I have to do to see that one of the good men I placed in the Department gets a raise”. I told Johnson that I would look into it and he said: “Don't look into it. Do it!”. When I looked into the case, I found that the man was the husband of one of Johnson's favorite secretaries. He didn't know a thing about the Department.

Bill Crockett told me a story which sickened him to the point that he resigned. As I said earlier, Bill had been on this trip to the Far East with Johnson. In an attempt to placate

the President, Bill had done everything imaginable in procuring staff, supplies, etc to keep Johnson happy. Johnson had laid down several rules on that trip. One of the things he said that had to be done on this trip was that not one cent of the expenses would appear on the White House's books. The Department of State or some other agency would pay for all the costs incurred and Bill would have to figure out how it was to be done. Bill got the Air Force to pay for the planes, someone else paid for this and someone else paid for that. But no costs would be born by the White House appropriation so that Johnson couldn't be criticized by Congress for taking an overseas junket.

One of the little niceties that Crockett knew would please President, or at least he thought that it would please him, was to take along on the trip an engraver from the White House staff. Tiffany's, the plush New York gifts store had done nothing for six weeks except make cigarette boxes and other works that the Vice-President could hand out as personal favors. The engraver was taken along to make sure that if an error was discovered, the inscriptions could be corrected—so that Johnson, that oldcurmudgeon, was well taken care of. The engraver was old, not terribly well, but he was a marvelous engraver. He was taken along in case any last minute engraving work that had to be done. The Presidential party got to Korea. The President was going to give one of these gifts to a Korean potentate, but it had the wrong inscription or date on it. One of Johnson's aids caught the error and told the President. The party got back on the plane and President Johnson threw a tirade—a real fit. He called Bill in and asked him who made the mistake. Bill told him the whole story, explaining how tired and sick the old engraver was and how he, Bill, had tried to make sure all would go smoothly by taking him along. Johnson said he couldn't care less and wanted the engraver “kicked in the you know what until his nose bleeds”—that is a cleaned up version of what he really said. That was the day Bill decided to resign.

Q: Have those experiences with the White House lead to any conclusions about the relationship between politics and a Career Service.

STEEVES: Yes, but my conclusions are broad rather than specific. This gives me the proper place to comment on my belief as to what the provisions of the Foreign service Act were intended to do in the first place. If the objective is to build a Career Service to serve the country , it has to be beyond the reach of any given political ephemeral influence. Now, of course it cannot be a law unto itself. The Foreign Service Act of 1946 spells that out very clearly. It protects the act or the officer against the whim of political fancy with he exercise of Due Process. An example came to mind to illustrate: the Boards had finished its work and the list had been sent to the White House, it was returned to me with a question of why Mr. X was not on that list—the President wanted to know. I told the White House staffer that I didn't think that the President knew Mr. X—I thought that it was probably a member of the staff that was interested. Furthermore, I pointed out that the lists were built objectively and meticulously on written records and that any exceptions that might be made to the system, would wreck it completely. But, I said, in the final analysis, the list is submitted to Congress by the President of the United States as his own recommendations. The Department submits the list to the President, but after he approves it, it becomes his recommendations. So if the President really felt that strongly about Mr. X, he can change the list and make it clear that he has added Mr. X to it. The Department couldn't do anything about that. A little while later, I got a call from the White House staffer, telling me that the President didn't want to make any changes. My conjecture was that even the President of the United States didn't want to go on the record having made changes in a promotion list, lest some politician on the Hill accuse him of having intervened on behalf of a friend in a well established non-partisan promotion system.

Q: I noticed in your autobiography, Mr. Ambassador, that you accept the thesis that some non- career personages could be given ambassadorial appointments. Where do you draw the line?

STEEVES: In the first place, you have to reserve the bulk of Ambassadorships—Presidential appointments—for career people for two reasons: In the first instance, you not going to keep a career service alive and vibrant, and the county's interest well served, unless you can hold out a promise of an Ambassadorship or a comparable high office to the officer you want to keep in that service for twenty-five years or more. The jobs that a career person shoots for are an Ambassadorship or an Assistant Secretaryship or something at that level, where the officer feels rewarded for what he or she has put a life's professional effort into. That is just human nature and common sense. It is true in the armed services and should be true in the Foreign Service. You are not going to get anyone to learn Cantonese(for instance) if he or she is going to be in today and out tomorrow. Cantonese will not do him or her any good in any other kind of work in the United States.

There are two contradictory demands placed on the Foreign Service: one, you are blamed by Congress if you don't speak the language of the country to which you are being assigned, and then expect us to accept a denial of the only status which will guarantee that facility-The Career Service! I happen to know one of these more obscure languages about as well as I know English. I have heard it said to me often with great approval that this facility has been a great feather in my cap, although I must admit, that capacity is rarely noticed until you don't have it for some particular assignment. Then the deficiency is used to criticize a person.

But, the Service would be shorn of these special skills, if its officers were not given the training necessary to acquire these language skills, and other professional training in a Career System. We never would have had a Tommy Thompson or a Chip Bohlen or people like that if they had not been in the Service at a time when those skills were recognized and cherished. A Chip Bohlen could not have been found for the demanding interpreting tasks at Yalta unless he had been encouraged to enroll in Russian language studies at an earlier period. It is as simple as that!

Now, on the issue of career and non-career, there is a need for non-career appointments to Foreign Service positions, regardless of the effort expended on improving the Service's excellence. In the first place, the Service is not the end-all of wisdom in the foreign affairs profession. You are bound to find people that have certain qualifications that make them eminently fine representatives in that line of work—the Bruces, the Bunkers. What finer people could we have? We need them for their intrinsic worth and we also need their perspectives as outsiders looking into the Foreign Service. We also need them as good representatives from the public, professional and business circles from which they came. What we don't need is the fellow who is being rewarded for some special service, as financial support or as, in one case, running a good parking service during the Inauguration festivities. That kind of appointment is detrimental.

Q: Has this problem gotten worse since you entered the Service?

STEEVES: Of course, it has. A lot worse. There is an increasing amount of political intrusion. It has gotten to the point at which there are so many factors to be taken into consideration. Unfortunately with the question these days not only having to do with political preference, but many other factors well beyond the question of the most qualified career officer. The disciplines of the Service no longer can beapplied like will your wife like it? She may not wish to go and that must be considered. Furthermore, all kinds of excuses are being made for people who don't want to serve at certain posts. In my days, when you were assigned, you went. The Foreign Service officers of that era will tell you, almost totally , that once you get to a post you will like as much, if not better, that you thought you might not like than any of the other posts at which you have served. You learn to like it. It is your job and you'll like it. You may not have thought so before arriving, but you did after you arrived.

Q: What other changes did you see in the Foreign Service during your career?

STEEVES: I will say again, that I blame the politicization of the process for opening the Flood Gates to all manner of abuses that have almost destroyed the Career Service! First, there was the break-down of the career idea along with a break-down of discipline. Overseas, there was a break-down of the family unit. I must confess that this is the same syndrome that we see in the American society at large. The Foreign Service is just a reflection of it. I don't think anything can be done about it. But now, if your wife doesn't want to go overseas, she doesn't have to. If she goes, she says: “I am not going to pour tea a for the Ambassador's wife. Why should I do that?” It used to be that the Ambassador's wife, if she were the right kind, led and encouraged people rather than ordered them around. It was a great privilege then for the other wives to do all kinds of things around the residence; they were a corporate work force to do many things, some pleasant, some unpleasant. This deterioration had started in my day and I hear that it has gotten worse ever since that wives are saying: “If I don't get paid for it, I won't do it”.

Q: Does that attitude reduce the professionalism of the Foreign Service?

STEEVES: Yes, I think it does. That may not be the exact right way to describe the phenomenon. It certainly reduces the esprit de corps greatly. It also greatly reduces the foreign Service's ability to do the job it is supposed to. We don't know any experience s as well as we know our own. Let me illustrate to you my point with a personal experience. In Kabul, on every Thursday, we had a great event during which the whole community would gather. It was at that time that we used to meet thenewcomers, make awards and say good-bye to those who were leaving the post. The young officers and wives had an opportunity to get together and make the occasion a wonderful remembrance. There was more good will, happiness and esprit de corps built during those get togethers than at any other time. Incidentally, giving Bill Crockett his due for his good ideas, he had the same program going in the Department when I got back there. He had receptions on the eighth floor for retirees and they were great events.

Q: Let me turn your attention for a minute to the issue of generalist versus specialist. What are your views on that issue?

STEEVES: The only thing I can say about that now when I am no longer close to the day-to-day activities, is that the Service has to be a mix of generalists and specialists. You want to be able to reach out and find a specialist when you need one. I think it would be a bad idea to emphasize specialization to the point where the Service would have nothing but specialists. It would also be detrimental to have nothing in the Service but generalists with no place for specialists.

I would have the same reward system for both types of officers. I don't know of any system that comes closer to being absolutely objective and correct for recognizing people for their achievements than the Foreign Service Promotion Boards. The Boards don't distinguish between generalist and specialists; both types had an equal crack at promotions.

Q: I believe in your time there developed the idea of a "cone" system—the division of the Foreign Service into a number of specialties. How did you feel about that?

STEEVES: I Never liked it; never understood it; didn't help in the management of the Foreign Service one bit. In the first place, the simile didn't conjure up an image that meant anything. A "cone" doesn't raise any image in people's minds; all it did was raise questions about what a "cone" was. You immediately think of an ice-cream cone, but that didn't lend itself as a true symbol or simile to what they were trying to achieve. It was a misnomer and it was a bad idea for promotion purposes. I would have preferred to manage everybody in one large pool. The Foreign Service gets broken up anyway when you are making assignments and promotions by looking at an officer's record. If you need an economist or a political officer or someone who speaks Persian or Swahili, you go to the record and find him or her; that is the way it is done.

Q: I know you have some views about having a Department staffed both by Civil Service and Foreign Service personnel. Please tell us what they are?

STEEVES: It is nearly impossible for the same person or staff to manage both systems simultaneously. I never realized that the Director General was also the Director of Personnel which put him in charge of a large number of Civil Servants. Civil Service people do not have the same motivation that compel Foreign Service personnel. They are not career minded. They are employee minded. They are union type people and are not moved by the same sensitivities or incentives as are Foreign Service people. The two systems just don't mix.

Q: What you are saying is that having two systems is an impediment to good management?

STEEVES: All people can't be in the same system. They can be in the same Bureau of Personnel. They can be administered by one manager, but with two separate staffs. They can work together in the same institution. It is out of necessity that the Department has Civil Service people to do things in Washington—service jobs in offices.

Q: How did you view the Wriston programs or similar efforts to integrate the two types of personnel?

STEEVES: I supported them with certain caveats. Wriston may have had its faults in the way it worked out, but the concept within limitations was good. It was probably not done thoroughly enough to get the right people in and keep some of the wrong ones out. It should never have been an effort at wholesale amalgamation The screening system was not set up or administered in a way, so far as the Foreign Service was concerned to include only those who would accept the Foreign Service concept. As I have said before the mixing of both groups, into one Career System is an unworkable system.

Now, where the Foreign Service has been slow to meet needed reforms even after W.W.II and where it could have used the Wriston Program more effectively in terms of getting qualified people or programs was apparent. It was not altogether willing to change to take care of its task. The Foreign Service should have seen the need for expansion both in terms of programs and people to take care of the future. It was a major undertaking to get the old Foreign Service to stir their brains to understand the need of tomorrow. The Wristonization program helped in bringing in people. As I remember them, I don't remember being characterized in people's minds as “Wristonees”. I didn't hear too much of that. Of course, I came in under the Manpower Act in a new Public Affairs Program.

Q: By the time you became the Director General had the Foreign Service accepted the new functions?

STEEVES: Yes. By the time I got to the Director General, I must say that the old Foreign Service of the Ray Hares, the Joe Satterthwaite and the Jeff Parsons—the Ivy League crowd who had been brought up in the old Eastern seaboard traditions—did not look on me as a recent interloper or anything of that nature. I had nothing but the greatest respect and deference from all ranks of people when I was the Director General. Even the greatly respected like David Bruce always minded his manners when he came back to Washington; he called on me and I would say to myself: “What on earth is David Bruce coming to call on me for?”. Same is true of Ellsworth Bunker and men of that nature.

Q: Your comments remind me of some new legislation that the Department was trying to get approved which would have placed most of the government's overseas representatives under a Foreign Service Act. I think you may have been involved in that effort. I assume you supported that effort?

STEEVES: I did. I favored that.

Q: Do you feel that having U.S. representatives overseas governed by different sets of rules, regulations and standards is detrimental to our activities overseas?

STEEVES: It is detrimental. But I didn't have any problems in Afghanistan because if you are aware that there is a danger, an Ambassador can erase any cleavage that may exist between different agencies territorial' domains. But I will bet you that in a place like London, where at one time we had 60 agencies, that there were some offices of some agencies that didn't know any other embassy staffs. They probably didn't know anybody but their immediate co-workers. That should not be, but when you have such a broad bureaucracy, you got to have overlap as for example the Agriculture office or the Commercial office and the Economic staff of the Embassy. To have some of the same concerns covered by two different offices is just plain nonsense. Fragmentation. It would take a very deft Ambassador to amalgamate such disparate staffs. Or the personnel themselves would have to have unusual sensitivity not to work in self-contained units.

Q: Was this much of a problem for you when you were Director General?

STEEVES: No, because we hadn't really gotten fully into the separate Foreign Services. Fragmentation hadn't yet taken hold, but you could see it coming. It was going to be difficult. I would have preferred even USIA to stay in the old career Foreign Service. I did not support the breaking away of USIA. I would have preferred to have it all stay in the Department. My view was based more on managerial problems caused. All personnel should feel that they are part of a family and not responsible to different headquarters. Everybody should feel that they are on the same team.

Q: Let me ask about the rise of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA) or perhaps the metamorphosis of AFSA to be more accurate, which was starting to take place while you were the Director General. How did you perceive that?

STEEVES: There was always a difference in my mind even then between some of the constructive ideas they had to foster and what I am afraid some were after. Officers of any rank should always be assured of a proper channel to put ideas(even strong complaints)forward. But instead of being able to contribute their ideas, which a lot of them did, others feeling that they would not confide them to their superiors, but felt they had to organize as “Young Turks” in what was almost a revolt, that was not a good thing. They didn't need to do that. There were existing channels for their perceived grievances that they should have tried. Some of the problem came from some who disagreed with The Dept's policies, and wanted to promote them in the halls of the Department. Some of those “Young Turks” have risen to high level jobs in the Department and the Foreign Service. I wonder what they think now about their activities 20 years ago.

Q:Did you have a lot of dealing with AFSA in the three year period you were Director General?

STEEVES: Not extensively. I have always been a member of AFSA but I never have worked on the staff of AFSA or done anything of that nature.

Q: The reason I mentioned this is because when I knew Idar Rimestad he complained bitterly about AFSA importuning about this or that.

Let me just ask then in conclusion, what stands in your mind over that three year period you were Director General?

STEEVES: I guess what does stand out in my mind is the regret of not being able to do more in advancing the Career Concept in concept and into he operation more before I left office. I know this is the negative side, I should not name that as one of the things, but unfortunately it does, that during the period that I was there that I happened to see what I regard as the beginning of the end of the Career Service. As near as I can tell this deterioration has gone on a pace since .

Q:This is in terms of discipline?

STEEVES: Yes, but it that and more; all the things we have talked about, discipline, attitude, training, the encouragement of people to stay in the Service as a protected career and life's profession. You know, I used a little anecdote in my book talking about this. I said that at one time I was lecturing to an incoming class of Foreign Service officers and some fellow spoke up and said, “Mr. Ambassador, after listening to you describing joining the Foreign Service and becoming a Foreign Service officer, it sounds like taking the veil.” I said, “Thanks for the idea, I never thought of that before, but it is not a bad idea.”

Q:Looking back with 20/20 insight, is there anything that Crockett, Rimestad or you could have done to have to, if not halt, slow down the deterioration, as you call it.

STEEVES: May I say, with no equivocation, that Rimestad was just a plain disaster. He was ignorant, dead set against the Foreign Service, he had a chip on his shoulder about the Foreign Service, he did not want the Foreign Service to get any type of recognition at all. Anything that came up that seemed to be setting the Foreign Service apart and any concept that would recognize The Foreign Service as a special Personnel System, say apart from employees in general or The Civil Service, was ananathema to him. Obviously such laws as the 1946 Foreign Service Act meant nothing to him.

Q: That was part of the reason for the deterioration?

STEEVES: Yes, The weakening of the Foreign Service was a recognized policy of Crockett and Rimestad. I understand that Congressman John Rooney, (this is not original with me Crockett told me) called him in when he told him he was leaving and said, “Well, you can resign provided you tell me who is going in or if I know there is a safe person taking your place that I can depend on to mind his P's and Q's.” Crockett said, “Who will it be?” And he said, “Idar Rimestad.”

Q: I think there was also a similar feeling in the White House. Rimestad having been part of the "handy men" for the Far East trip that you have referred to, which must have been something in the Annual of the Foreign Service. Did you see any change in the American society which then replicated itself in the Foreign Service?

STEEVES: Yes, The Feminist Movement. The Minority demand for more recognition, The Youth Movement, if you can call it that, restless about waiting for their turn for recognition.

Q: How about the minorities? The drive to include more minorities in the Foreign Service?

STEEVES: It would be too much to say that it did not give us any trouble, I will tell you what we had done when that arose in the Foreign Service. You know we had a minorities' man on the staff to keep us advised and to see that this issue was not being forgotten —Eddie Williams, equal opportunity Officer. He, during that period was an appropriately aggressive black—more than some others had been. I have heard him talk more recently in some other jobs he has had and he is pretty reasonable. Not that he was terribly unreasonable in those days either, but he was pretty aggressive, I suppose he felt he had to be in order to get his job done. In providing for blacks and certain groups to be given their just chance, we started making certain provisions for blacks to get a little advantage by way of summer training. To help them pass some examinations we took past examinations as examples to work on and put them through summer courses practicing going through them. I had black Foreign Service officers who were already in that objected most vehemently. They said, "You are getting at this thing exactly the wrong way. All you will do will be to transplant into the Foreign Service, one of the last small places where people are recognized for what they know and not who they know, or because they are black and not a white, a nasty qualification. Look what it does to all of those of us who came in the regular way."

Q: How did you feel about that?

STEEVES: That is the way I feel about it. The effort was a failure. After all the work we went through to get some of them in through that door, I think the record is that none of them stayed.

Q: You sided with them?

STEEVES: With the critics who came to me. Sure I do. I feel that way in general. If you ever get a chance read a few of the columns of this black economist from Stanford by the name of Sowell.

Q: Tom Sowell?

STEEVES: Yes. He makes more sense than any man of black or white for a long, long while. He had gone so far as to say that there is nothing that we have done that has so degraded the blacks and made them what they are as teaching them that they do not have to achieve and be independent by of Welfare and 'coddling' practices. He said that so far as the same principal has slopped over into the poor white classes you get the same result. But when you teach people to be paupers and when you teach them to stand around with their hands out and not be self-reliant that is exactly what you get. He preaches that doctrine all the time. His last column that I read made great sense. His comments on the terrible thing that happened in Los Angeles about that beating of that black. Did you read it?

Q: No. I have only read his books I haven't read any of his columns.

STEEVES: He is a very able commentator.

Q: Okay, Mr. Ambassador. Thank you very much you have been very helpful and the discussion very illuminating.

Q (Mr. Kennedy): We were talking about your time as Director General and there is just one thing that I would like to ask. You were there from '66 to '69, what about Vietnam? Can you tell us how this hit the Foreign Service as far as you were concerned? This was the very height of the war.

STEEVES: Let's cover the Vietnam matter both from my view of it from the Office of he Director General and also from the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs. Of course the influence on our DG's Office was great—the responsibilities of my job as Director General of the Foreign Service in a very specific way. In addition to the Senior officers we had to find for leadership post, we kept two hundred beginner FSOs going through Vietnam on Rotation which was a real strain.

Q: The Far Eastern Bureau. You were there from '59 to 1962.

STEEVES: Yes. Now we move back to the period of my first deep involvement in that Southeast Asian fracas right from the very beginning when it was confined to Laos. That is where I really was introduced to John Kennedy.

Q: Why don't we start right there. We are going to talk now going back a bit when you were in the Far Eastern Bureau.

STEEVES: When we started having our problems with Southeast Asia it was confined to Laos and involved the Pathet Lao , the communist crowd. I went up their two or three times to confer with people on the ground.

Q: You were Deputy Assistant Secretary. What was your field?

STEEVES: My particular field was political/military affairs or Asian affairs that got me very much involved in all of that business. The insurgency had gotten very bad about the time that Kennedy came in.

Q: That would have been January, 1961.

STEEVES: Yes. The year before I had worked with President Eisenhower about it too. I went over to see him one day to brief him on what the problem was. To do it I had to give him the background of some of the chief operatives that were giving us the most trouble. Obviously I couldn't do it without giving him a pretty careful rundown on the prince that was the head of the country—Prince Souvanna Phouma. Souvanna Phouma turned out to be a real deadbeat. He was the Prince that had played off the communist against us. He was using the Communist Pathet Lao which his brother headed, against us and trying to make us believe all the time that he was staunchly anti-communist. One of the schemes he had floated for which he had solicited AID money profiting a million or more dollars profit which he used in buying the planes and setting up the operation of Air Laos. That all came from what we paid off Souvanna Phouma for. I say that in order to give you a little idea of how much money this guy really had.

When I got through that laborious hour with President Eisenhower telling him the whole background of this, to show how much he had really understood of what I was talking , he said, “This guy has fleeced us of millions. Why don't you give the guy six thousand dollars and tell him to go away and get lost.” Imagine giving Souvanna Phouma six thousand dollars and telling him to get lost! I was so discouraged that I found some convenient way to fold up my file and leave.

Kennedy became very, very interested in the Laos debacle and from that to the whole region, that I think from my long contact with him on the subject, that I know more accurately what Kennedy thought about the whole Southeast Asian Issue than a lot of people who are fond of saying what Kennedy would have or would not have done about this fateful chapter in our history!

During his Presidency he certainly he was very, very worried and very willing to put in whatever it was that had to go into Southeast Asia in order to deny that area to the

communists getting a foothold in that part of Asia. Kennedy said, “Tell me in very short words just how you feel about it.” I said, “Mr. President, you know there is just one simple question that you have to answer in your own mind before you decide what we do and before we start thinking about how we do it. Does the communists getting a hold in this part of the world pose a danger to the United States' interests or transgress our treaty promises to that area, or doesn't it? If it does and if it is in our interests then we can center our attention on what we ought to be doing, but it if doesn't lets get out now before we put another soldier, another plane or anything in there.” And he said, “That's easy. We just cannot allow them to get away with what they are attempting to do because of our treaty arrangement under SEATO, etc.” That was Kennedy's orders and the reason we did all the things we did that eventually led down the trail that ended up in Vietnam. At another point I remember using the expression “you stop placating these people and you do what you got to do while you can do it, or further down the peninsula you will have something on your hands in Vietnam that will make what is happening in Laos look like a Sunday school picnic.” So that was that.

Q: While we are talking about Laos, how did you find dealing with your boss, Averell Harriman?

STEEVES: Before I answer that you must remember that my dealing with Governor Harriman was a long time after the contact I had with Kennedy referred to above. I cannot say how accurately Harriman reflected Kennedy's opinion or the party by the time we got to the Conference on Laos in Geneva. That is where the Governor comes in. Harriman was interested chiefly in two things-his political stature in the United States and his personal stature built on the reputation of having dealt with Stalin. A difficult guy to deal with. When we got into the Laos conference he and I came to a parting of the ways when I simply would not knuckle under to his wishes.

Q: What was the issue?

STEEVES: Let me state the issue succinctly before I get involved in the failure. We had reached an impasse on how to achieve peace between the Communist North and the Free South in the Peninsula. The conflict between the surrogates was raging in Laos particularly. It was agreed that a conference of ALL parties concerned should meet and after observing a CEASE FIRE, terms would be agreed by all sides by which PEACE could replace conflict.

So, the conference was called; we had the fourteen nations agree to come and abide by the conditions: if no verified cease-fire NO CONFERENCE. The name: The Fourteen Nation Conference on Laos meeting in Geneva. It was to be kicked off with a great deal of fanfare. The crucial part of it came when they decided that we would go ahead and join with thirteen others, in this conference in Geneva with the parties concerned. Those of the great powers, meaning: ourselves, Canadians, British, French, Russians, Chinese. So the fourteen nations all together were represented around that table. We were on our way to a NATO conference in Oslo, Norway, which I attended with Secretary Rusk. He was going to Oslo and there the agreement was, we to were wait there until we got the verification from the United Nations observation crew made up of the Poles, Canadians and Indians, that they had arranged a cease fire on the ground the British, French and we had said we would not even go to the conference unless they could assure us that they had a cease fire. So all of the foreign ministers of all the countries involved started off for Geneva. In Oslo Rusk would get on the line with Washington every morning and would ask what the situation was on the ground, which meant what had been heard about the truce. They would say they didn't know. The Secretary said he was not going down to Geneva until they did know..

The NATO conference came to an end which eventually meant that the French, Canadians, British and ourselves, finally made the first concession and all got in their planes and went to Geneva even though they had not been given the assurance. There we sat, those high powered fellows sat in Geneva for two weeks while Rusk would not

move until he thought they had the assurance that the ground was safe and could go ahead with the meeting. He never did get it. But, as it always happens in the end, we caved in. Finally they said they would go ahead with the conference anyway and try to outlast them there—wear them down. Rusk said to me, “You know, if we have to put staff over here that we can spare, some high powered name to spare, someone we can do with out—Averell Harriman is the best one I can think of.” I said, “Thanks a lot.” He said, “You can stay here and look after the meeting, be the executive officer and take care of it while Averell makes political hay.”

He started, from the very moment he came over, hobnobbing with the Russians to find out what they wanted in order to make an agreement. From then on his song was, “all the Russians want is an agreement.” I used to say, “Governor, sure, all they want is an agreement on their terms. If they can have that they will agree within the next hour. It all depends on what they want to agree to.”

That was the sorry beginning(and the end) of the so-called Laos Agreements that were never worth the paper they were written on because they didn't pay one bit of attention to the Terms of The Agreement. It ended up in the whole Vietnam fiasco-Kissinger Negotiation where we finally were snookered out of the whole situation. We had in the over a half million troops over there before we were through with it. We Lost 58,000 people.

Now come the after thoughts as to what you would have done, especially in lieu of what we have done in a campaign after learning our lesson in Vietnam. You will note that General Powell and George Schwarzkopf said over and over again that when we got into this business in the Near East we will never repeat the troubles we got into in Vietnam. To put it in terms of what we all remember, the person who came the closest to saying what should have been done in Vietnam was old Senator Goldwater. He went at it the wrong way and probably too sternly. It would have had to have been tailored a little bit differently because I am not sure we had quite the force. We certainly didn't have the consolidated authority arranged behind us like Bush did it in The Gulf, but we did have the targets and

with the timing and things that were there, if we had kept the management of that out of the White House and out of the politicos' hands and if they had been taught one really good lesson the first three weeks of that campaign, that would have been the end of it. The lesson would have been to take Hanoi off the map.

Q: We are talking now about a very successful, possibly month's, campaign against Iraq. In three weeks Iraq was basically devastated by our air force and then we went in. It was a very quick thing and in a way a direct result of deciding after Vietnam to never again fight aggression by a gradual approach.

STEEVES: The one thing, in addition to everything else, that this last campaign has done is to lay to rest forever the Vietnam syndrome—and I hope forever.

Q: I would like to come now to the time when you were Ambassador to Afghanistan from 1962-66. How did that appointment come about? I take it you had parted on not the best of terms with Averell Harriman. Was this to get you out of the way, or was this something you sought for?

STEEVES: I suppose a little bit of both. I am sure that Harriman was quite happy to see me go, because if he was going to stay for a while as Assistant Secretary for the Far East, as he did, the last person he wanted to see around was me since we had clashed so often over policy. To me he was the ultimate appeaser and he didn't have much use for those of us that thought like we did about things of that nature.

The other side of it was that they had first of all decided that they wanted me to go to Nepal, but my wife had had a very heavy cancer operation just before that and when the medics got to looking it over they said she couldn't go there because of lack of medical facilities in Kathmandu. Then they came up with the Kabul idea. Now I am fair minded enough to realize that it wasn't only somebody who thought it would be a good idea for me to go as ambassador to a part of the world that I knew a little bit about, tinged a little bit with Harriman's happiness to get me out of there, that got me to Afghanistan. I always

say that whatever it was he did me the best turn I have had for a long time because I really enjoyed it.

Q: Could you describe the situation in Afghanistan at the time?

STEEVES: Yes, I can. Afghanistan as you remember was a never, never border state sandwiched between ourselves and the Soviet Union. We had decided as a result of the Richards Commission that went up there to try and decide which of the Near East countries we would give military aid to and which we would not that Afghanistan was not the place to get involved militarily. The essence of their recommendation was, “You had better stop before you get into aid on the border up there because it is too close to the Soviet Union. We have nothing to gain and the best thing to do is to try and keep foreign arms out of Afghanistan, because if we supply them with arms, all we will be doing will be to buy animosity and, secondly, almost worse still, we will only give the Afghans arms to fight against Pakistanis and we don't want to do that either..”

So it was with that policy in hand that I went to Afghanistan with orders to be decent and friendly and amicable with the Soviets. Let them know open-facely that we had nothing to vie with them about so far as Afghanistan was concerned. We would be glad to share the AID program with them—we do one part they do another—which we did. The Soviet Ambassador turned out to be one of the best friends I had in the country. I saw him later in Moscow and he gave me a great big bear hug for we had had a wonderful time together in Kabul . When Kennedy was assassinated, Mrs. Antonov wrote from Moscow a lovely letter of sympathy. He was the Doyen of the Corps when he left and I was the Doyen of the Corps when I left. But when he left he said, “I don't speak English, I don't speak French, I don't speak German, all I know is Russian and a bit of Farsi, which makes it very difficult for me to get into too many receptions. So when it comes to farewell parties, leave me alone. “ But, when I asked him to come to our place for a farewell dinner, he said, “You know I told everybody no, but for you I make a difference,” and he came. So we got along fine with the Russians.

But our biggest problem with the Afghans that had to be negotiated out was their animosity with Pakistan. They did some of the stupidest things. One concerned the closing of all the southern border portal points to spite the Pakistanis! This of course was the routes we used to get our aid to Afghanistan and you can imagine how that went over with Congress! They even let the wheat rot on the border that we were delivering. Imagine how much that upset Congress.

The Shah in Iran finally got into the act, on our behest really. He said, “Why don't you come over to my place and talk this thing over.” So they went over to Tehran and sat down. They were almost coming to an agreement to opening the borders and trying to be decent , when word got out that they had clashed over something or other and were going to break up and do nothing. President Kennedy got word about it, I guess from me, and sent word back, “For heavens sake, you get a hold of the king if you can and tell him that as a personal favor to me to stop that nonsense. Get on the telephone to the head of your delegation in Tehran and tell them to stay there and knock some heads together and come to some kind of formula to get those borders open so we can get some aid to you.” I went to see the king, he did as I asked him to and got on the telephone and told his Delegation to get cracking and get this thing taken care of. He did, the border was opened and everything was hunky-dory afterwards. That was the forerunner of being able to bring the king and Queen to the United States on an Official Visit. That was the last really big official Reception as a State Visit for a foreigner Head of State that Kennedy ever gave before he was assassinated. So it was a very sorrowful thing, but prior to that a very pleasant thing all together. That visit was a great public relations success. Kennedy was at his best during that visit.

Q: Well now, we have this open policy of neutrality not to play the great game in Afghanistan. You were the Ambassador, Kennedy had sent his letter out saying the Ambassador was in charge, how about the CIA? I would have thought they would have been a very difficult group to control in a place like Afghanistan where espionage started.

STEEVES: I did it very easily. When they told me I was going there and I started meeting the people who were going to go out as the heads of my sections. When they told me that Alan Wolfe was to be my new chief of station and he came over to see me, I said, “Now Alan, I just want one thing understood, and let's have this be it. You will not engage in any activity that I don't make the decision whether I want to know about it or whether I don't. Are we clear that far?” Alan said, “Yes.” I said, “Fine. Number two, you don't send any messages out without me knowing whether I want to see them or whether I don't. Is that clear?” He said, “Yes, that's right.” I said, “Fine. As long as we have those rules we will get along fine. I am not going to have anyone serving under me in the embassy that is telling one story to Washington and me telling them another. Its got to be together. We work things out in the field as to what we report. You and the military people and me must, from the embassy standpoint, sing from the same song book.” He never broke his word. We never had any trouble.

He came to me one time and told me the rudiments of a Soviet defector that they had, and asked how much I wanted to know. I said , “Go on until I tell you to stop.” He told me what the story was. I said, “Fine, don't tell me anything more.” I never learned anything more but I know the guy got out.

Q: How about dealing with the Afghan government. Was there any problems?

STEEVES: Oh, plenty. But, I tell you, for a country that is considered to be backward in a lot of things, they had some of the sharpest diplomats and people dealing in negotiation of anybody I know. I had some very dicey moments. I had to persuade them that it was to our mutual interest to let a survey team look for poison mushrooms in Afghanistan and they thought that was a very funny, cooked up story. Another time we had University of Chicago museum people who were looking for a special flea that only dwelt on a certain mouse that was found on a certain section of Afghanistan and no where else in the world. They

wanted a monograph done on this particular little beast and they asked me to persuade the Afghans to let this team get in to do this research. They did.

I got along extremely well with them. We had a wonderful tour of duty up there. I used to hunt and ride with them throughout their rugged beautiful highlands, I never knew better recreation..

Q: This was at the height of the drug culture in the United States and in other places, and there was the well-known sort of hashish trail which attracted young Americans to Nepal, etc. How did you deal with that?

STEEVES: It was not the national traffic aspect that was bothering us. Our biggest trouble with it as you may remember in the 60s was the hippies and the vagrants of all varieties trooping through like a bunch of bums and that was the level that I had to deal with, not the national problem. For instance, we got a message from a Senior Senator one day looking for a niece , as I remember a niece. We found her in one of the most flea-bitten, filthy, holes down in the bowels of the bazaar in Kabul, high on drugs. We got her out of the country. That was about the level that we knew about the drug traffic. We really didn't know of it being part of the heroin, or cocaine or drug railway.

Q: But it wasn't that at the time. These things change.

STEEVES: It really wasn't back then. But I am afraid it became that later.

Q: You say you got on well with the Soviets, did you feel that they were also playing this "lets not stir things up" game there?

STEEVES: Yes, they really were. The Soviets were building roads at the same time we were. There was a section where somehow in our surveys a mile had been left out. I concluded at the time that it was our fault. I went to the Soviet Ambassador and told him the story and said, "Our equipment is far, far away." "Don't worry about it, we will go out

and put it in," he said. And so they did . There is that one little piece of road down there that in the Russian-American kilometer of highway. When we had the celebration for the finishing of that whole circle around Afghanistan, the Russians and Americans attended it together.

Q: You were called back from Afghanistan to the Director General position. One last question before we finish if you would. Could you talk about the effect, while you were Director General, of our involvement in Vietnam. This was a very traumatic thing not only for society, but also for the Foreign Service young and old.

STEEVES: Yes, and this became all the more a heart burning personal problem to me because we encouraged all of the young recruits coming in for their baptism of fire to spend a tour in Vietnam, and also for budgetary reasons, every class 8 officer that came in to the Service to do his stint in Vietnam before he was assigned anywhere else. I tell you those fellows took it on the chin like troopers. Some of them covered themselves with glory. They went out with the troops into those villages that were invested with Viet Cong. My hero of that whole crowd was Phil Manhard. He came into my office one day and said, "You know, I have an odd request to make of you." I said, "What is it Phil?" He said, "I want to go to Vietnam." "Well," I said, "If you really want to go, it is not going to be a hard request to fulfill. If you feel your family situation is right that you can go and you would like to go, the Lord bless you. Go ahead and put it in." He said, "Fine, I mean it." The upshot of that was that he was a prisoner of war. He was caught in the "Tet Offensive" He was a prisoner in a jungle "pit'-almost, for six years!.

Q: For about seven years I think.

STEEVES: Yes, maybe but it was terrible. The hardships he went through were just awful.

Q: I am interviewing him now. He has some health problems, but other than that...

STEEVES: He came up and spent a day with me here when he came back.

Q: Did you find it hard to deal with some of the young Foreign Service officers? I was consul general in Saigon in '69 and '70, and we were getting some young officers who were having a hard time because their hearts were in joining the demonstrations against our policy. Was it a difficult time in terms of Service discipline?

STEEVES: Yes. You see that was the spinoff of allowing a thing to fester too long. If you allow anything of that nature to go along long enough where it begins to breed an outside movement to foment discontent. Its like a small eddy of wind blowing circle building into a cyclone. Let me illustrate this in terms of our recent experience. If you had let Desert Storm carry on long enough until the press really got a hold of the instances of Kuwaitis dancing their troubles away in the Cairo bars and a few things of that nature, you would have had some GIs causing some trouble too. There is always plenty of things that can happen that go wrong with a long, drawn out tedious thing. Corruption sets in . You get your general Ky's that turn out to be crooked friends. You know all the other names in Vietnam that we have dealt with. I have sat down and listened to Diem for half the night and I know what a problem he could be. These things begin to fester and the first thing you know you have a real problem on your hands which gets to our own people after a while. It gets to the civilians, it gets to the troops.

We are not accustomed to going in and sticking to anything a long while. The people back here that talked about keeping people out there in the sand for a year and a half and two while we fiddled around with sanctions needed to have their heads examined.

Q: Well, they were looking for an out.

STEEVES: They were just looking for something that said" do nothing". But anyway, that didn't happen, but that is what happened in Vietnam. That is the reason why I say the great mistake that we made if we were going to do anything in Vietnam we ought to have done it in the first three weeks, taken out Haiphong Harbor, blasted it out of existence and as much of Hanoi complex we needed to in order to bring them to their senses, or get out.

Q: Mr. Ambassador this has been a very thoughtful account. I would like to ask just one thing to put in here. I notice a draft of an autobiography. Could you tell what the name of it is and who is going to publish it for those who are interested to go deeper into this ?

STEEVES: Yes, I will tell you what my plan is at the present time so you will certainly have access to it as quickly as possible. The name of it is, “Safir,” which is the Persian/Arabic name for ambassador. That is just the word that I have chosen for the title of the book. It is to be published in a Triangle Press in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The text is complete down to the index.

The pictures have gone in to them. I expect to have the announcement in the Hershey and Harrisburg papers, the first part of May. I had thought just for the fun of doing it, not that it will raise any great interest, that I might also find the proper way of going down to DACOR [Diplomat and Consular Officers Retired Club) and having an autograph signing some day for those people who might be interested. I would give a copy to the library there, etc. It is going to be hardback.

Q: I just might also, for the tape, point out that you have done an interview for the John F. Kennedy Library which should have been made public by this time.

STEEVES: Yes, that is right.

Q: Well, thank you very much. Very good.

End of interview